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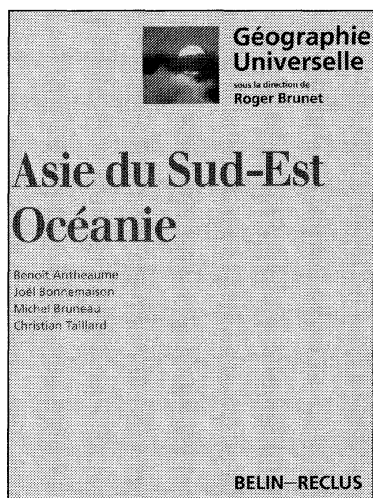
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peau des habitants d'un vaste monde et qui nous fait rêver... C'est une belle réussite.

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For some years, those of us who have even the most marginal contact with the world of French geography have known that a "grand projet" had been conceived. This was the decision to produce a second *Géographie universelle*. The first published in the late nineteenth century had been a "milestone" in the creation of geography as a discipline and fine example of the geographer's art of regional description.

Through what may be described as a fortuitous "division of labour", I have undertaken to review the Southeast Asian portion of this volume, which is edited by Michel Bruneau and Christian Taillard. Readers should be reminded that this represents only a small portion of the complete project, which consists of ten volumes covering the world. For those of us who have spent most of our professional lives attempting to write about, interpret and understand the region of Southeast Asia, we are all agreed about one thing : the complexity and heterogeneity of Southeast Asia make it extraordinarily difficult to generalize about the region. In contemporary times, this is further complicated by new intellectual and political battles that are being fought about the "right" of Western interpreters, as opposed to indigenous researchers to write about other regions of the world. Perhaps, fortunately these debates do not intrude in this volume on Southeast Asia. This point is well represented by the bibliography, where only some 15 of the approximately 200 references are to indigenous scholars. Thus, this study of

Southeast Asia remains uncontestably a Western enterprise and Western interpretation.

Before I discuss the content of this volume, it is important to familiarize the reader with the mode of presentation of the material. While the organization of the chapters is rather conventional, the volume moves from a series of general chapters on the physical, historical and demographic features of Southeast Asia as a whole, to a review of individual countries and, finally, a discussion of development, urbanization and regional trends; the mode of presentation is in no sense conventional.

First while the chapters are individually authored, there is a sense of collectivity about the spirit of the writing. Each author attempts to capture the elusive essence of the region and the individual countries. For instance, De Koninck writes about *la révolution du territoire* in his chapter on Singapore; with this phrase, he attempts to capture the manner in which the Singapore state has attempted to usurp, shape and construct the territory of Singapore to fulfill the goals of making it a "World City". Bruneau focuses on the "centre/periphery" contrasts in his chapter on Thailand. This gives the volume a sense of "intellectual excitement", which formalized regional description of the older English regional geographies of the region never approached.

Secondly, the presentation of the material is superb. The volume has numerous maps, the majority in colour, which are centrally related to these texts. Many of them incorporate ongoing research using contemporary statistical sources and some are superb syntheses such as the maps showing the spatial model of Viet-Nam on page 208. These are further complemented by a wide range of photographs and satellite images. One wonders how Reclus would have interpreted these images, had he had the opportunity.

It is this "collective" nature of the volume that gives it its distinctiveness and makes this study an indispensable tool for the teaching and understanding of Southeast Asia. These later tasks are also aided by an excellent place names index that enables you to locate information on places as little known as Bangka.

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